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DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Federal Emergency Management Agency

[Docket ID: FEMA-2018-0008]

Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program

AGENCY: Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

ACTION: Notice of availability of grant application and application deadline.

SUMMARY: Pursuant to the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974, as amended, the Administrator of FEMA is publishing this notice describing the Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) Program application process, deadlines, and award selection criteria. This notice explains the differences, if any, between these guidelines and those recommended by representatives of the national fire service leadership during the annual meeting of the Criteria Development Panel, which was held February 27, 2017. The application period for the FY 2017 AFG Program was December 26, 2017, through February 2, 2018, and was announced on the AFG website at www.fema.gov/firegrants, as well as at www.grants.gov.

DATES: Grant applications for the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program were accepted electronically at <https://portal.fema.gov>, from December 26, 2017, through February 2, 2018, at 5:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time.

ADDRESSES: Assistance to Firefighters Grant Branch, DHS/FEMA, 400 C Street SW., 3N, Washington, DC 20472-3635.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Catherine Patterson, Branch Chief, Assistance to Firefighters Grant Branch, 1-866-274-0960.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The AFG Program awards grants directly to fire departments, nonaffiliated emergency medical services (EMS) organizations, and State fire training academies (SFTAs) for the purpose of enhancing the health and safety of first responders and improving their abilities to protect the public from fire and fire-related hazards.

Applications for the FY 2017 AFG Program will be submitted and processed online at <https://portal.fema.gov>. Before the application period starts, the FY 2017 AFG Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) was published on the AFG website. The AFG website provides additional information and materials useful to applicants including Frequently Asked Questions, a Get Ready Guide, and a Quick Reference Guide. Based on past AFG application periods, FEMA anticipates the receipt of 10,000 to 15,000 applications for the FY 2017 AFG Program, and the ability to award approximately 2,500 grants.

Congressional Appropriations:

For the FY 2017 AFG Program, Congress appropriated \$345,000,000 (Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act, 2017, Public Law 115-31). From this amount, \$310,500,000 will be made available for AFG awards. In addition, the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974, as amended (15 U.S.C. 2229), requires that a minimum of 10 percent of available funds be expended for Fire Prevention and Safety Grants (FP&S). FP&S awards will be made directly to local fire departments and to local, regional, State, or national entities recognized for their expertise in the fields of fire prevention and firefighter safety research and development. Funds appropriated for FY 2017 will be available for obligation and award until September 30, 2018.

The Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 further directs FEMA to administer these appropriations according to the following requirements:

- Career fire department: Not less than 25 percent of available grant funds.
- Volunteer fire department: Not less than 25 percent of available grant funds.
- Combination fire department and departments using paid-on-call firefighting personnel: Not less than 25 percent of available grant funds.
- Open Competition (career, volunteer, and/or combination fire departments and departments using paid-on-call firefighting personnel): Not less than 10 percent of available grant funds awarded.
- Emergency Medical Services Providers including fire departments and nonaffiliated EMS organizations: Not less than 3.5 percent of available grants funds awarded, with nonaffiliated EMS providers receiving no more than 2 percent of the total available grant funds.
- State Fire Training Academies: Not more than 3 percent of available grant funds shall be collectively awarded to State fire training academy applicants, with a maximum of \$500,000 per applicant.
- Vehicles: Not more than 25 percent of available grant funds may be used for the purchase of vehicles; 10 percent of those vehicle funds will be dedicated

to the funding of ambulances. Vehicle funds will be distributed as equally as possible among urban, suburban, and rural community applicants.

- **Micro Grants:** This is a voluntary funding limitation choice made by the applicant for requests submitted within the Operations and Safety activity; it is not an additional funding opportunity. Micro Grants are awards that have a federal participation (share) that does not exceed \$25,000. Only fire departments and nonaffiliated EMS organizations are eligible to choose Micro Grants, and the only eligible Micro Grants requests are for Training, Equipment, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and Wellness and Fitness activities. Applicants that select Micro Grants as a funding opportunity may receive additional consideration for award. If an applicant selects Micro Grants in their application, they will be limited in the total amount of funding their organization can be awarded; if they are requesting funding in excess of \$25,000 federal participation, they should not select Micro Grants.

Background of the AFG Program

Since 2001, AFG has helped firefighters and other first responders to obtain critically needed equipment, protective gear, emergency vehicles, training, and other resources needed to protect the public and emergency personnel from fire and related hazards. FEMA awards grants on a competitive basis to the applicants that best address the AFG Program's priorities and provide the most compelling justification. Applications that best address AFG priorities, as identified in the Application Evaluation Criteria, will be reviewed by a panel composed of fire service personnel.

AFG has three program activities:

- Operations and Safety
- Vehicle Acquisition
- Regional Projects

The priorities for each activity are fully outlined in the NOFO.

Application Evaluation Criteria

Prior to making a grant award, FEMA is required by 31 U.S.C. 3321, and 41 U.S.C. 2313 to review information available through any Office of Management and Budget (OMB) designated repositories of government-wide eligibility qualification or financial integrity information. Therefore, application evaluation criteria may include the following risk based considerations of the applicant: (1) financial stability; (2) quality of management systems and ability to meet management standards; (3) history of performance in managing federal awards; (4) reports and findings from audits; and (5) ability to effectively implement statutory, regulatory, or other requirements.

FEMA will rank all complete and submitted applications based on how well they match program priorities for the type of jurisdiction(s) served. Answers to activity specific questions provide information used to determine each application's ranking relative to the stated program priorities.

Funding priorities and criteria for evaluating AFG applications are established by FEMA based on the recommendations from the Criteria Development Panel (CDP). CDP is comprised of fire service professionals that make recommendations to FEMA regarding the creation of new, or the modification of, previously established funding priorities, as well as developing criteria for awarding grants. The content of the NOFO reflects implementation of CDP's recommendations with respect to the priorities and evaluation criteria for awards.

The nine major fire service organizations represented on the CDP are:

- International Association of Fire Chiefs
- International Association of Fire Fighters
- National Volunteer Fire Council
- National Fire Protection Association
- National Association of State Fire Marshals
- International Association of Arson Investigators
- International Society of Fire Service Instructors
- North American Fire Training Directors
- Congressional Fire Service Institute

Review and Selection Process

AFG applications are reviewed through a multi-phase process. All applications are electronically pre-scored and ranked based on how well they align with the funding priorities outlined in this notice. Applications with the highest pre-score rankings are then scored competitively by (no less than three) members of the Peer Panel Review process. Applications will also be evaluated through a series of internal FEMA review processes for completeness, adherence to programmatic guidelines, technical feasibility, and anticipated effectiveness of the proposed project(s). Below is the process by which applications will be reviewed:

1. Pre-scoring Process

The application undergoes an electronic pre-scoring process based on established program priorities listed within the NOFO and answers to activity specific questions within the online application. Application narratives are not reviewed during pre-scoring. Request details and budget information should comply with program guidance and statutory funding limitations. The pre-score is 50 percent of the total application score.

2. Peer Review Panel Process

Applications with the highest pre-score will undergo peer review. The peer review is comprised of fire service representatives recommended by CDP national organizations. The panelists assess the merits of each application based on the narrative section of the application, including the evaluation elements listed in the Narrative Evaluation Criteria below. Panelists will independently score each project within the application, discuss the merits and/or shortcomings of the application with his or her

peers, and document the findings. A consensus is not required. The panel score is 50 percent of the total application score.

Narrative Evaluation Criteria

1. Financial Need (25 Percent)

Applicants should describe their financial need and how consistent it is with the intent of the AFG Program. This statement should include details describing the applicant's financial distress, summarized budget constraints, unsuccessful attempts to secure other funding, and proof that their financial distress is out of their control.

2. Project Description and Budget (25 Percent)

This statement should clearly explain the applicant's project objectives and the relationship between those objectives and the applicant's budget and risk analysis. The applicant should describe the activities, including program priorities or facility modifications, ensuring consistency with project objectives, the applicant's mission, and any national, State, and/or local requirements. Applicants should link the proposed expenses to operations and safety, as well as the completion of the project goals.

3. Operations and Safety/Cost Benefit (25 Percent)

Applicants should describe how they plan to address the operations and personal safety needs of their organization, including cost effectiveness and sharing assets. This statement should also include details about gaining the maximum benefits from grant funding by citing reasonable or required costs, such as specific overhead and

administrative costs. The applicant's request should also be consistent with their mission and identify how funding will benefit their organization and personnel.

4. Statement of Effect/Impact on Daily Operations (25 Percent)

This statement should explain how these funds will enhance the organization's overall effectiveness. It should address how an award will improve daily operations and reduce the organization's risks. Applicants should include how frequently the requested items will be used, and in what capacity. Applicants should also indicate how the requested items will help the community and increase the organization's ability to save additional lives or property.

5. Technical Evaluation Process

The highest ranked applications are considered within the fundable range. Applications that are in the fundable range undergo both a technical review by a subject matter expert, as well as a FEMA AFG Branch review prior to being recommended for an award. The FEMA AFG Branch will assess the request with respect to costs, quantities, feasibility, eligibility, and recipient responsibility prior to recommending an application for award. Once the technical evaluation process is complete, the cumulative score for each application will be determined and FEMA will generate a final ranking of applications. FEMA will award grants based on this final ranking and the required funding limitations in statute.

Eligible Applicants

Fire Departments: Fire departments operating in any of the 56 States and territories (which include any State of the United States, the District of Columbia, the

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the US Virgin Islands, Guam, or American Samoa) and federally recognized American Indian and Alaska native tribes, or any tribal organization, are eligible grant applicants.

A fire department is an agency or organization having a formally recognized arrangement with a State, territory, local, or tribal authority (city, county, parish, fire district, township, town, or other governing body) to provide fire suppression to a population within a geographically fixed primary first due response area.

Nonaffiliated EMS organizations: Nonaffiliated EMS organizations operating in any of the 56 States and territories (which include any State of the United States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the US Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico) and any federally recognized Indian tribe or tribal organization are eligible applicants.

A nonaffiliated EMS organization is an agency or organization that is a public or private nonprofit emergency medical services entity providing medical transport that is not affiliated with a hospital and does not serve a geographic area in which emergency medical services are adequately provided by a fire department.

FEMA considers the following as hospitals under the AFG Program:

- Clinics
- Medical centers
- Medical colleges or universities
- Infirmaries
- Surgery centers

- Any other institutions, associations, or foundations providing medical, surgical, or psychiatric care and/or treatment for the sick or injured.

State Fire Training Academies: A SFTA operating in any of the 56 States (which includes any State of the United States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico) are eligible applicants. Applicants must be designated either by legislation or by a Governor's declaration as the sole State fire service training agency within a State. To be eligible, the designated SFTA shall be the only State agency/bureau/division, or entity within that State.

Ineligibility

- To avoid a duplication of benefits, FEMA reserves the right to review all program areas for grant applications where two or more organizations share a single facility. To be eligible as a separate organization, two or more fire departments or nonaffiliated EMS organizations will have different funding streams, personnel rosters, or Employee Identification Numbers (EINs). If two or more organizations share facilities and each submits an application in the same program area (i.e. Equipment, Modify Facilities, Personal Protective Equipment, Training, and Wellness and Fitness Programs) FEMA will carefully review each program for eligibility.
- Fire-based EMS organizations are not eligible to apply as nonaffiliated EMS organizations. Fire-based EMS training and equipment must be requested by a fire department under the AFG component program Operations and Safety.
- Eligible applicants may submit only one application for each activity (e.g., Operations and Safety or Regional), but may submit for multiple projects within each activity. Under the Vehicle Activity, applicants may submit one application for vehicles for their department and one separate application to host a Regional vehicle. Duplicate applications (more than one application in the same activity) may be disqualified.
- An Operations and Safety applicant may submit one application for an eligible project (i.e., turn out gear); it may not submit a Regional application for the same project.

Statutory Limits to Funding

Congress has enacted statutory limits to the amount of funding that a grant recipient may receive from the AFG Program in any single fiscal year (15 U.S.C.2229(c)(2)) based on the population served. Awards will be limited based on the size of the population protected by the applicant, as indicated below. Notwithstanding the annual limits stated below, the FEMA Administrator may not award a grant in an amount that exceeds one percent of the available grants funds in such fiscal year, except where it is determined that such recipient has an extraordinary need for a grant in an amount that exceeds the one percent aggregate limit.

- In the case of a recipient that serves a jurisdiction with 100,000 people or fewer, the amount of available grant funds awarded to such recipient shall not exceed \$1 million in any fiscal year.

- In the case of a recipient that serves a jurisdiction with more than 100,000 people, but not more than 500,000 people, the amount of available grant funds awarded to such recipient shall not exceed \$2 million in any fiscal year.

- In the case of a recipient that serves a jurisdiction with more than 500,000, but not more than 1 million people, the amount of available grant funds awarded to such recipient shall not exceed \$3 million in any fiscal year.

- In the case of a recipient that serves a jurisdiction with more than 1 million people but not more than 2,500,000 people, the amount of available grant funds awarded to such recipient shall not exceed \$6 million for any fiscal year, but is subject to the one percent aggregate cap of \$3,450,000 for FY 2017.

- In the case of a recipient that serves a jurisdiction with more than 2,500,000 people, the amount of available grant funds awarded to such recipient shall not

exceed \$9 million in any fiscal year, but is subject to the one percent aggregate cap of \$3,450,000 for FY 2017.

- FEMA may not waive the caps on the maximum amount of available grant funds awarded based upon population.

The cumulative total of the federal share of awards in Operations and Safety, Regional, and Vehicle Acquisition activities will be considered when assessing award amounts and any limitations thereto. Applicants may request funding up to the statutory limit on each of their applications.

For example, an applicant that serves a jurisdiction with more than 100,000 people, but not more than 500,000 people, may request up to \$2 million on their Operations and Safety Application, and up to \$2 million on their Vehicle Acquisition request. However, should both grants be awarded, the applicant would have to choose which award to accept if the cumulative value of both applications exceeds the statutory limits.

Cost Sharing and Maintenance of Effort

Grant recipients must share in the costs of the projects funded under this grant program as required by 15 U.S.C. 2229 (k)(1) and in accordance with applicable federal regulations at 2 CFR part 200, but they are not required to have the cost-share at the time of application nor at the time of award. However, before a grant is awarded, FEMA will contact potential awardees to determine whether the grant recipient has the funding in hand or if the grant recipient has a viable plan to obtain the funding necessary to fulfill the cost-sharing requirement.

In general, an eligible applicant seeking a grant shall agree to make available non-federal funds equal to not less than 15 percent of the grant awarded. However, the cost share will vary as follows based on the size of the population served by the organization:

- Applicants serving areas with populations above 20,000, but not more than 1 million, shall agree to make available non-federal funds equal to not less than 10 percent of the total project cost.
- Applicants that serve populations of 20,000 or less must match the federal grant funds with an amount of non-federal funds equal to 5 percent of the total project cost.

The cost share for SFTAs and joint/regional projects will be based on the population of the entire State or region, respectively, not the population of the host organization.

On a case-by-case basis, FEMA may allow a grant recipient that may already own assets (equipment or vehicles) to use the trade-in allowance/credit value of those assets as "cash" for the purpose of meeting the cost-share obligation of their AFG award. In-kind, cost-share matches are not allowed.

Grant recipients under this grant program must also agree to a maintenance of effort requirement as required by 15 U.S.C. 2229 (k)(3) (referred to as a "maintenance of expenditure" requirement in that statute). A grant recipient shall agree to maintain during the term of the grant the applicant's aggregate expenditures relating to the activities allowable under the NOFO at not less than 80 percent of the average amount of such expenditures in the two fiscal years preceding the fiscal year in which the grant amounts are received.

In cases of demonstrated economic hardship, and on the application of the grant recipient, the Administrator of FEMA may waive or reduce a grant recipient's cost share requirement or maintenance of expenditure requirement. As required by statute, the Administrator of FEMA will establish guidelines for determining what constitutes economic hardship and will publish these guidelines at FEMA's website www.fema.gov/grants.

Prior to the start of the FY 2017 AFG application period, FEMA conducted applicant workshops and/or internet webinars to inform potential applicants about the AFG Program. In addition, FEMA provided applicants with information at the AFG website www.fema.gov/firegrants to help them prepare quality grant applications. The AFG Help Desk was staffed throughout the application period to assist applicants with the automated application process as well as assistance with any questions they had.

Applicants can reach the AFG Help Desk through a toll-free telephone number during normal business hours (1-866- 274-0960) or electronic mail firegrants@dhs.gov.

Application Process

Organizations may submit one application per application period in each of the three AFG Program areas (e.g., one application for Operations and Safety, one for Vehicle Acquisition, and/or a separate application to be a Joint/Regional Project host). If an organization submits more than one application for any single AFG Program area (e.g., two applications for Operations and Safety, two for Vehicles, etc.), either intentionally or unintentionally, FEMA will deem all applications submitted by that organization for the particular program to be ineligible for funding.

Applicants accessed the grant application electronically at <https://portal.fema.gov>.

The application was also accessible from the U.S. Fire Administration's website <http://www.usfa.fema.gov> and <http://www.grants.gov>. New applicants must register and establish a user name and password for secure access to the grant application. Previous AFG grant applicants must use their previously established user name and passwords.

Applicants answered questions about their grant request that reflect the AFG funding priorities, described below. In addition, each applicant must complete four separate narratives for each project or grant activity requested. Grant applicants will also provide relevant information about their organization's characteristics, call volume, and existing organizational capabilities.

System for Award Management (SAM)

Per 2 CFR 25.200, all federal grant applicants and recipients must register in <https://SAM.gov>. SAM is the Federal Government's System for Awards Management, and registration is free of charge. Applicants must maintain current information in SAM that is consistent with the data provided in their AFG grant application and in the Dun & Bradstreet (DUNS) database. FEMA may not accept any application, process any awards, and consider any payment or amendment requests, unless the applicant or grant recipient has complied with the requirements to provide a valid DUNS number and an active SAM registration. The grant applicant's banking information, EIN, organization/entity name, address, and DUNS number must match the same information provided in SAM.

Criteria Development Panel (CDP) Recommendations

If there are any differences between the published AFG guidelines and the recommendations made by the CDP, FEMA must explain them and publish the information in the *Federal Register* prior to awarding any grant under the AFG Program. For FY 2017, FEMA accepted, and will implement, all of the CDP's recommendations for the prioritization of eligible activities.

Adopted Recommendations for FY 2017

Equipment/Personal Protection Equipment

The FY 2017 NOFO revises and, in some places changes, the priorities for applications submitted for equipment and PPE acquisitions under the Operations and Safety Activity. Under these changes, the FY 2017 NOFO and application now include questions designed to solicit pertinent information from the applicant with regard to the purpose of the request. The criteria are designed to be easier to understand and will assist FEMA in obtaining the necessary information to assess the application request. The numerical scores for each activity line item requested are based on objective criteria in order to reduce the subjectivity of the category itself. The following changes for 2017 are as follows:

- The purposes for applicant's request to acquire equipment have been revised. These new purposes for FY 2017 are ranked by priority as follows:
 - Obtain equipment to achieve minimum operational and deployment standards for existing missions (high),
 - Replace inoperable/broken/damaged to current standard (high),
 - Replace obsolete/non-compliant to upgraded technology (medium),
 - Increase supply for minimum service requirement due to community growth (low),

- Obtain equipment for new mission (low).
- The purposes for an applicant's request to acquire personal protective gear have been revised. These new purposes for FY 2017 are ranked by priority as follows:
 - Replace damaged broken inoperable equipment to current standard (high),
 - Replace obsolete/non-compliant to upgrade technology (medium),
 - Increase supply for new hires and/or existing firefighters that do not have one set of turnout gear (PPE) or allocated seated positions (high).
- Call volume is a consideration, but only between like departments, i.e. career, combination, and/or volunteer. Additional consideration for call volume can contribute to the justification of a new risk and/or the primary first due response area or region.
- Age of equipment terminology changed from “medium” to “intermediate.” This was done to avoid confusion within similar name in other parts of the NOFO, i.e. (Medium) priority.
- Vehicle mounted exhaust systems are now listed under the equipment activity.
- Fire departments and SFTA will have separate lists of allowable equipment that each type of entity may apply for and acquire with AFG funds.
- The following items are now considered a “medium” priority for fire department applicants: Props, simulators, mobile data terminals (MDT), and computers used in training and mobile computing devices used on scene.
- EMS training aids with an age category of “short” (5-7 year life expectancy) are now eligible expense for FY 2017 (i.e., CPR mannequins, airway training equipment, IVs, etc.).
- Monitoring and sampling devices are now categorized as “Sampling

Devices.” This was done to avoid confusion within similar specialized monitoring devices, for use in “medium” and “low” priorities.

- Tow vehicles are now listed under a separate chart in the equipment section to clarify the priority levels between application types, i.e. fire department and SFTA.
- Nozzles, appliances, foam inductors are all high priorities and listed in one category. These items were combined and defined with an age category of “long.”

Wellness and Fitness Micro Grants

- Wellness and Fitness activities are now eligible when applying for a Micro Grant.
- Cancer screening is now available under the Wellness & Fitness activity.
- All NFPA 1583 training has been moved to Wellness & Fitness. This request was previously requested under “Training.”

Vehicles

- Quint apparatus has been added as a high priority in the Vehicle Acquisition activity.

AUTHORITY: 15 U.S.C. 2229.

Dated: February 5, 2018.

Brock Long,

Administrator,

Federal Emergency Management Agency.

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